

INDEX TO VOLUME 36

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The Agricultural Education Magazine

CONTENTS—ARTICLES BY PROGRAM AREAS

PROGRAM PLANNING	23
TEACHING METHODS AND MATERIALS	30
FARMING PROGRAMS AND OCCUPATIONAL EXPERIENCE	17
FARM MECHANICS	18
FUTURE FARMERS AND NEW FARMERS	12
GUIDANCE	21

SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONS	12
YOUNG FARMER EDUCATION	5
ADULT FARMER EDUCATION	13
SUPERVISION	4
PROFESSIONAL	13
FACILITIES	7
BOOK REVIEWS	36
TEACHER EDUCATION	12

PROGRAM PLANNING

	Year 1963
The Community Changed—I Decided to Stay—Reed Franz, Area Joint High School	August
The Community Changed—I Decided to Change Jobs—J. P. Bressler, Teacher of English, Williamsport, Pennsylvania	August
Re-Planning High School Programs in Agricultural Education—Harold M. Byram, Teacher Education, Michigan State University, E. Lansing, Michigan	October
Wanted—Educational Inventors—Guest Editorial—Gerald B. James and Harry G. Beard, Vocational Education, Raleigh, North Carolina	November
Technical Education in the Agricultural Education Program, J. H. Blackmon and C. G. Dawson, Consultants Agricultural Technology Education, Raleigh, North Carolina	November
Junior Colleges Pioneer in Training Agricultural Technicians—S. S. Sutherland, Department of Agricultural Education—The University of California, Davis	November
The Agricultural College and Technical Education, Fred Snyder, Director of Short Courses, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania	November
Three Curricula for Training Agricultural Technicians at Modesto Junior College, by Jerry J. Halterman, Instructor in Agricultural Engineering, Modesto Junior College, California	November
Michigan Workshop Studies Nonfarm Agricultural Business—Raymond M. Clark, Teacher Education, Michigan State University, E. Lansing, Michigan	November

Year 1964

Educational Facilities for Agricultural Education—Guest Editorial—Joe P. Bail, Teacher Education, Cornell University, Ithaca, N. Y.	May
Eight Steps in Improving Facilities—From the Editor's Desk—Ralph Woodin, Teacher Education, Ohio State University, Columbus	May
Both Sides of the Issue—Teaching Vo Ag Is a Full Time Job—Harold R. Crawford, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, Sac City, Iowa	May
Teaching and Farming Can Be Combined—Joe Harper, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, Colo. Iowa	May
Vo Ag in Downtown El Paso, Richard D. Clugston, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, El Paso, Texas	May
Human Betterment—Best Basis for Evaluation—Guest Editorial—G. R. Cochran, State Supervisor, St. Paul, Minn.	June
A New Thrust for Evaluation—From the Editor's Desk—Ralph Woodin, Teacher Education, Ohio State University, Columbus	June
Don't Wait Too Long before Evaluating—Harold Schoaf, Supervisor, State Division of Agricultural Education, Topeka, Kansas	June
Use Local People to Review Local Programs—R. J. Denny and J. R. Clary, Supervision, Raleigh, North Carolina	June
Evaluating Instructional Programs—Paul E. Hemp, Teacher Education, University of Illinois, Urbana	June
Principals Evaluate Tennessee Vo Ag Programs—Edwin E. Lamberth, Department of Education and Psychology, Bethel College, McKenzie Tennessee	June
Planning for the Next Five Years—C. E. Dean, Teacher Education, The Agricultural and Technical College of North Carolina	June
What Do We Really Know About Our Program?—Curtis R. Weston, Teacher Education, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri	June
An Appraisal of 25 Purposes of Vocational Agriculture—John K. Coster, Norbert J. Nelson and Frank J. Woerdehoff, Teacher Education, Purdue University, Lafayette, Indiana	March

TEACHING METHODS AND MATERIALS

	Year 1963
There Is a Place for More Science in Vocational Agricultural Teaching—Guest Editorial—Allen E. Starosta, Vocational Agriculture Teacher, Dodge City, Kansas	July
Our Role in Improving Vocational Education—From the	

Editor's Desk—Ralph J. Woodin, Teacher Education, Ohio State University, Columbus	July
Programmed Learning in Agricultural Education—Jim Hannemann, Graduate Assistant, Cornell University, Ithaca, N. Y.	July
Adjusting the Curriculum in a Nebraska Department—Richard F. Welton, Vocational Agriculture Teacher, Kearney, Nebr.	July
Flexibility in Planning—Douglas C. Towne, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	July
Pumpkins on Oak Trees—Arthur Floyd, Teacher Education, Tuskegee Institute, Alabama	July
Using Problem Solving in Supervised Farming—Irven Parker, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, Creighton Nebraska, and Jim Hanneman, Graduate Assistant, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York	July
How to Prepare for Teaching—N. K. Quarles, Teacher Education, East Texas State College, Commerce, Texas	August
Non-Farm Agricultural Occupations and Curriculum Planning—E. Wayne Courtney and John K. Coster, Purdue University, Lafayette, Indiana	August
A New Approach to Teaching Farm Management Is Necessary—Guest Editorial—Harold F. Duis, Program Specialist in Agricultural Education, U. S. Office of Education, Washington, D. C.	September
Evolving Patterns of Farm Management Teaching—Leon W. Boucher and Floyd G. McCormick, Teacher Education, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio	September
A Contest Aids in Teaching Farm Management in Nevada—Howard Christensen, Teacher Education, in Cooperation with Wayne Burton and Clay Little, Agricultural Economics Department, University of Nevada, Reno, Nevada	September
Missouri's Farm Management Plan—Robert L. Hayward and James A. Bailey, District Supervisors, Jefferson City, Missouri	September
Providing Teachers Farm Management Materials—Everett D. Edgington, Teacher Education, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma	September
Organizing the High School Curriculum Around Farm Business Management—Gerald R. Fuller, Teacher Education, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois	September
Analysis Charts for Studying Farm Efficiency—J. H. Herbst, Vocational Agricultural Service and Agricultural Economics, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois	September
Teaching Farm Related Occupations in Maryland—Wilmer L. Harris, Vocational Agriculture Teacher, Cumberland Valley Joint High School, Mechanicsburg, Pa.	July
Students or Sheep—Carlton West, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, Horseheads, New York	September
Farm Management Education Programs in Minnesota—Edward J. O'Connell, Area Vocational School, St. Cloud, Minnesota	September
Wisconsin Teaching Aid Contest	September

Year 1964

Teaching Principles, Concepts, and the Like—Guest Editorial—Cassie Hammonds, Teacher Education, The University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky	January
Today's Teaching Methods—From the Editor's Desk—Ralph J. Woodin, Teacher Education, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio	January
Improving Teaching Practice—Paul Hemp, Teacher Education, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois	January
Is Problem-Solving Instruction Worth Saving?—Richard H. Wilson, Teacher Education, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio	January
Finding the Time for Quality Teaching—J. C. Atherton, Teacher Education, Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas	January
Teaching Basic Principles in Science in the Vocational Agriculture Curriculum—C. E. Richard, Teacher Education, Virginia Polytechnic Institute, Blacksburg, Va.	January
The Problem Method and Non-directive Guidance—Harold Chase, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, Ulica, Nebraska	January
Teaching the "Fundamental Understandings" in Elementary Soil Science—Dr. E. G. Jungwirth, Teacher—Education, The Hebrew University, Israel	January

Teaching for Better Land Use—Kemble H. Tellefson, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, Hermiston, Oregon	January
What Agriculture Should Be Taught the First Two Years—L. A. Blackburn, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, Berlin, Wisconsin	June

FARMING PROGRAMS AND OCCUPATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Procedures for Providing On-Farm Instruction for In-School Students—C. Jordan Hudson, Jr., Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, Victoria, Virginia	July
Planning Agricultural Experiences—Guest Editorial—George W. Wiegert, Jr., Teacher Education, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee	August
Farming Programs Not Enough—From the Editor's Desk—Ralph J. Woodin, Teacher Education, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio	August
Our Graduates Operate Dairy Farms—Robert L. Mitchell, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, Ripley, Oklahoma	August
Six Types of Supervised Practice for Virginia High School Students—Evans G. Thompson, Agricultural Education, Blacksburg, Virginia	August
Farming Programs Are Basic to Occupational Experience in Agriculture—Dale C. Aebischer, Supervisor, Wisconsin Board of Vocational and Adult Education, Madison, Wisconsin	August
\$52,000 Worth of Credit for Farming Programs—Maynard J. Iverson, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, Minot, North Dakota	August
Providing Occupational Experience for Boys with Limited Opportunities—E. M. Juergenson, Teacher Education, University of California, Davis, California	August
Ohio Seniors Given Work Experience in Farm Related Occupations—Rex Cunningham, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, Arcadia, Ohio	August
Providing Supervised Practice—School and Community Should Share—Texton R. Miller, Teacher Education, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, North Carolina	August
Farming Programs or Supervised Practice Programs?—C. S. McLearn, Teacher Education, Virginia Polytechnic Institute, Blacksburg, Virginia	September
Six Tips on Developing Farming Programs—Dale Nestingen, Vocational Agriculture Instructor, Westby, Wisconsin	September
Record Book Daze—Diagnosis and Treatment—Allan L. Utech, Supervisor, Springfield, Illinois	October
A Foundation Beef Bull Program for Alabama—H. N. Lewis, Livestock Specialist in Vocational Agriculture, Auburn, Alabama	January
Is a Test Plot an Asset to Your Department?—H. J. McPherson, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, Ashton, Illinois	April
Promoting Better Supervised Farming Programs—Joseph N. Auel, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, Pender, Nebraska	January
Mapping Farm Visits—Mike Cullen, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, Willmar, Minnesota	May

FARM MECHANICS

Cabinet Aids in Cleaning Chores—Norman Pautz, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, Chilton, Wisconsin	August
Teach Small Engine Repair to All Age Groups—Arnold Lingle, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, Salisbury, North Carolina	October
Agricultural Mechanics—What Now—Guest Editorial—Carl F. Albrecht, Department of Agricultural Engineering, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan	March
Farm Mechanics Teaching Starts in the Shop but—From the Editor's Desk—Ralph J. Woodin, Teacher Education, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio	March
When Teaching Farm Power Start with Small Engines—James P. Clouse and J. Marvin Ebbert, Teacher Education, Purdue University, Lafayette, Indiana	March
Science and Farm Mechanics . . . for Future Teachers—Carlton E. Johnson, Agricultural Engineering, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio	March
Teaching Farm Building Construction—Harry D. Henderson, Agricultural Engineering and Charles Salouts, Teacher Education, Wisconsin State College and Institute of Technology, Platteville, Wisconsin	March
My Students Demonstrate Their Shop Skills—J. L. Yates, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, Town Creek, Alabama	March
Making Tool Storage Attractive and Functional—C. O. Jacobs, Farm Mechanics, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas	March
Unit Operations for Teaching Farm Machinery—R. Paul Marvin, Teacher Education, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, Minnesota	March
Hay Racks or Hat Racks?—V. E. Christensen, Teacher Education, Cornell University, Ithaca, N. Y.	March
Teach Them Hard-Surface Welding—Arlyn W. Hollander, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, Markesan, Wisconsin	March
Maryland Farmers Suggest Farm Mechanics Curriculum—David M. Tugend, Agricultural Extension Agent, Ellicott City, Maryland	March
Increasing Your Tool Storage Space—Harlan E. Ridenour, Teacher Education, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio	April
A Dynamometer in Teaching Farm Tractor Maintenance—James E. Lewis, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, Cascade, Montana	June
Evaluating Farm Mechanics—Marvin R. Monson, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, Newman Grove, Nebraska	June
Farm Mechanics for College Preparation, Hindrance or Benefit?—Thomas A. Hoerner, Department of Agricultural Engineering, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa	June
Farm Mechanics Instruction for Oklahoma Teachers—Dale A. Cotton, Executive Secretary, Oklahoma FFA Association, Stillwater, Oklahoma	June

FUTURE FARMERS AND NEW FARMERS

What Is an FFA Boy?—Robert Severance Jr., Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, Simpson, Kansas	September
--	-----------

Michigan FFA Poultry Contest Keeps Abreast of New Technology—Dr. Charles Sheppard, and William A. Householder, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan	January
--	---------

The State F.F.A. Convention—Who Should Attend—Eugene Cowden, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, Halfway, Oregon	February
Using Sycametric Data in Improving the FFA Chapter—Bert Bryant, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, Oilton, Oklahoma	February
Vinton Chapter Welcomes Strangers—Lindley Hoyt, Vinton, Iowa	April
Appraising Your F.F.A. Program—W. W. Larson, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, Jefferson, Wisconsin	June
Parents Need to Understand Our Goals—Joe Harper, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, Colo., Iowa	April
Recognizing F.F.A. Mothers—Walter Penrod, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, North Manchester, Indiana	May
Parents Enjoy an Exhibit at the FFA Banquet—Carl G. Devin, Teacher Vocational Agriculture, Nyssa High School, Nyssa, Oregon	July
Kiwanis Honors Wisconsin Vo-Ag Accomplishments—Louis M. Sasman, Madison, Wisconsin	July
Louisiana Scores Judging Contests with Digital Computer—E. E. Beckett, Dept. Agricultural Engineering, Ruston, Louisiana	August
The Future Farmer as His Teacher Sees Him—C. C. Beam, Instructor, Vocational Agriculture, Herndon, Virginia	December

GUIDANCE

A Letter to Robin—Alfred H. Krebs, Teacher Education, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois	July
The Need for Vocational Agricultural Training—Carlus R. Owen, Vo-Ag Instructor, Madisonville, Tennessee	July
Graduate Guidance Courses for Vo-Ag Teachers—Marvin Ebbert, Vocational Agriculture Teacher, Elwood, Indiana	July
Factors Influencing High School Vocational Agriculture Graduates' Choices of Occupations—John E. Bishop, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, Winterset, Iowa	July
Fifteen Years Experience in Teaching for Agricultural Careers in North Carolina—John W. Allison, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, China Grove, North Carolina	July
Our High School—College Bridge—Durland Weale, Vo-Ag Instructor, Addison, New York	July
Three Farms for Every Vo-Ag Graduate—James T. Horner, Teacher Education, University of Nebraska and Donavon Benson, Student in Agricultural Education, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska	September

The Modern Guidance Role of the Teacher of Agriculture—Guest Editorial—Harold M. Byram, Teacher Education, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan	April
Vocational Agriculture as Preparation for College—Louis M. Thompson, Associate Dean of Agriculture, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa	April
At Okemos One in Six Take Agriculture—Roland Cook, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, Okemos, Michigan	April
Improving Counseling Interviews—John P. Thompson, Graduate Assistant, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland	April
Teaching for Occupational Guidance in Agriculture—Norman K. Hoover, Teacher Education, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania	April
Are We "Out-Guidanced"?—Joseph K. Bailey, Supervisor, Ripley, West Virginia	April
Guidance Functions in Promoting Farm Partnerships—J. T. Horner, Teacher Education, University of Nebraska, Lincoln and D. R. Sandy, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, York, Nebraska	April
A Broader Concept of Guidance Is Needed—John H. Rodgers, Teacher Education, Clemson College, Clemson, South Carolina	April
Personal Values of Vocational Agriculture Students and Their Teachers—O. E. Thompson, Teacher Education, University of California, Davis, California	April
Interest Inventory Test Developed for Prospective Vo-Ag Students—Robert W. Walker, Teacher of Agriculture, Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania	April
Agricultural Occupations—A Course for Seniors—Layle D. Lawrence, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, Medicine Lodge, Kansas	January
Nebraska Study Shows Need for More Workers with Farm Background	April
Exploring Farm Related Occupations—Three Years Experience with a Three-Phase Program in Indiana—Richard L. Sparrow, Vocational Agriculture Teacher, Manchester High School, North Manchester, Indiana	April

A Testing Program in Selecting Students for Agricultural Education—Walter Ward, Vo-Ag Instructor, Palmer, Alaska	December
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SCHOOL COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Securing Faculty Support—Guest Editorial—J. C. Atherton, Teacher Education, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas	December
Vocational Education Depends Upon the Community Power Structure—Otto Legg, Teacher Education, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee	December
Teachers Must Communicate—Guest Editorial—H. E. Edwards, State Supervisor, Charleston, West Virginia	February
Communication in Agriculture Education—From the Editor's Desk—Ralph J. Woodin, Teacher Education, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio	February
The Radio-Television Farm Director—Your Public Relations Counsel, and Your Friend—Bruce Davies, Farm Service Director, KFAB, Omaha, Nebraska	February
Who will Do the Public Relations Job?—John Holcomb, Agricultural Education, Texas A & M University,	

College Station, Texas and Alton D. Ice, Executive Secretary, Vocational Agriculture Teachers Association of Texas, Austin, Texas	February
Better Communications Through Better Correspondence—Wilson W. Carnes, Editor, The National Future Farmer, Alexandria, Virginia	February
Using the Press for Better PR—J. C. Atherton, Teacher Education, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas	February
Acquaint the Community with the Vocational Agriculture Program—Jack Anderson and Ross Beach, Teachers of Vocational Agriculture, Marshall, Michigan	February
Improving Relationships with County Extension Agents—Ahmed M. Omar, Graduate Student, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan	February
Bill of Rights Aids Indiana Administrators and Vo-Ag Teachers—W. S. Weaver, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, Delphi, Indiana	February
Some Good Bets for Better Communications—James E. Hamilton, Past President N.V.A.T.A., Audubon, Iowa	March

YOUNG FARMER EDUCATION

Equality of Opportunity Needed—From the Editor's Desk—Ralph J. Woodin, Teacher Education, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio	Year 1963
Local Study Can Improve the Y.F.A.—N. K. Quarles, Teacher Education, East Texas State College, Commerce, Texas	October
A "Packaged" Young Farmer Program—Avery E. Marshall, Teacher of Young and Adult Farmer Classes, Richland Center, Wisconsin	October
Anderson Community Supports Their Young Farmer Program—Wesley Norton, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, Anderson, California	November
Conference Reports on the Future of Adult and Young Farmer Education—Allen Bjergo, Graduate Assistant, Teacher Education, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, New Mexico	February

ADULT FARMER EDUCATION

Farm Management for Whom?—Cayce Scarborough, Teacher Education, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, North Carolina	Year 1963
In-Service Education in Farm Management—Julian M. Campbell, State Supervisor, Richmond, Virginia	September
Farm Business Analysis Can Be Taught—R. Paul Marvin, Teacher Education, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, Minnesota	September
He Didn't Know—Guest Editorial—J. C. Atherton, Teacher Education, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas	October
Five Ways to a New Era in Adult Farmer Education—Howard W. Deems, Teacher Education, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska	October
In Our Adult Farmer Program You Start with a Farm Management Core—A. G. Bullard, Supervision, Raleigh, North Carolina	October
Ten Ways to Please Adult Farmers—Robert L. Anderson, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, Tekamah, Nebraska	October
Corn Contest Sparks Adult Course—Paul E. Burns, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, Tecumseh, Michigan	October
Vo-Ag Specialists Spark Texas Adult Programs—Bob Craig, Teacher Education, Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas, College Station, Texas	November
Using Full-Time Teachers for Young and Adult Farmers—Melvin W. Cooper, Assistant Supervisor Vocational Agriculture, Madison, Wisconsin	November

Using a State Directory of Resource Personnel for Adult and Young Farmer Education—E. L. Tiner, Consultant, Young and Adult Farmer Education, Texas Education Agency, Austin, Texas	Year 1964
Profit Is the Goal of Adult Farmer Teaching—Milo J. Peterson, Teacher Education, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, Minnesota	January
Evaluate Adult Farmer Programs Now—Ralph A. Benton, Teacher Education, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois	February

SUPERVISION

Arguments for and Against Special Funds for Public School Education in Agriculture—J. R. Warmbrod, Teacher Education, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois	Year 1963
Nebraska Recognizes Teachers of Teachers—C. A. Crome, Assistant Supervisor, Lincoln, Nebraska	July
State Plan Aids in Teaching Farm Management—H. W. Green, Subject Matter Specialists, Auburn, Alabama	December
A Modern Oklahoma Shop—Edward Perry, Vocational Agriculture Instructor, Jenks, Oklahoma	Year 1964
	May

PROFESSIONAL

Studies in Progress in Agricultural Education	Year 1963
	October
Fellowships and Assistantships Available for Graduate Study in Agricultural Education—V. R. Cardozer, Teacher Education, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland	Year 1964
	January
Magazine Reports a Year of Progress—Ralph J. Woodin, Teacher Education, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio	March
Sutherland Receives Distinguished Service Award	April
The Public Supports Vocational Agriculture—Here Are the Facts!—Gilbert S. Guiler, Teacher Education, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio	June
More Articles from Teachers Needed—Dr. Ralph J. Woodin, Teacher Education, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio	May
Thirty-Two Years of Vo-Ag at Shawnee Mission—Harold Garver, Retired Vocational Agriculture Teacher, Shawnee Mission, Kansas	Year 1963
	July

Prentice-Hall Scholarship Winners Announced	August
The First Agricultural Textbook—Thomas K. Shotwell, Graduate Student, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana	September
National Center Seminar Outlines New Roles—Robert E. Taylor, Director, The National Center for Advanced Study and Research in Agricultural Education, Columbus, Ohio	November
You Will Enjoy Retirement if—Louis Sasman, Formerly State Supervisor of Vocational Agriculture, Madison, Wisconsin	November
200 Attend Kansas Vocational Agriculture Reunion—J. D. Adams, Vocational Agriculture Teacher (Retired), Garden City, Kansas	Year 1964
John F. Kennedy and Vocational Education—Ralph J. Woodin, Teacher Education, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio	February

FACILITIES

Facilities for Multiple Teacher Departments—Ralph J. Woodin, Teacher Education, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio	Year 1964
	May
Facilities for Farm Shop Unlimited—Herbert W. Mackey, Vocational Agriculture Teacher, Norman, Oklahoma	May
A New 8,000 Square Foot Vocational Agriculture Building—Dale A. Cotton, Executive Secretary, Oklahoma FFA Association, Stillwater, Oklahoma	May
Steel Buildings for Vocational Agriculture—Lloyd Lawson, Agricultural Science & FFA Education, Denver, Colorado	May
A Stand for Chart Storage and Display—Merrell Barfield, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, Wharton, Texas	May
Iowa Students Build Addition to Shop—Fred L. Goudge, Teacher of Vocational Agriculture, Akron, Iowa	May
Liabilities in School Shops—J. B. Morton, Supervisor, Oklahoma Vocational Agriculture Service, Stillwater, Oklahoma	May

TEACHER EDUCATION

Technical Education Programs in Agriculture Are Needed—From the Editor's Desk—Ralph J. Woodin, Teacher Education, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio	Year 1963
	November
When You Talk with Future Teachers—From the Editor's Desk—Ralph J. Woodin, Teacher Education, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio	December
Recruitment Responsibilities—Ralph E. Bender, Teacher Education, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio	December
Factors Influencing the Vocational Choices of Agriculture College Freshmen—Ralph R. Bentley, Teacher Education, Purdue University, Lafayette, Indiana	December
Recruitment Requires Coordination—Clarence J. Cunningham, Department of Agricultural Education, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio	December
Who Wants to Be Stationed by the Owl?—Joel H. Magisos, Teacher Education, Washington State University, Pullman, Washington	December
Making Up Your Mind to Teach—Clyde F. Archer, Senior in Agricultural Education, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio	December
Farm Skills for Prospective Teachers—H. W. Gadda, Teacher Education, South Dakota State College, Brookings, South Dakota	December
Why Don't Vo-Ag Teachers Get a Master's Degree?—Lawrence La Rue, Vo-Ag Teacher, Vallivue High School, Caldwell, Idaho	December
A Study of the Participating Experiences of Student Teachers of Vocational Agriculture—James H. Hutchins, Supervisor, Louisiana, Baton Rouge, Louisiana	Year 1964
	February
New Agricultural Education Facilities at NMSU—J. D. McComas, Agricultural Education, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, New Mexico	May
A New Department and a New Vista at N.M.S.U.—Philip J. Leyendecker, Dean & Director, College of Agriculture & Home Economics, New Mexico State University and J. D. McComas, Head, Department of Agricultural & Extension Education, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, New Mexico	June

BOOK REVIEWS

About Some Animals That Work For Man by Melvin Uhl, 1963	Year 1963
	July
The American Indian as a Farmer by Loverne Morris, 1963	July
The Desert World by Alonzo W. Pond	July
Modern Farm Power by William J. Promersberger and Frank E. Bishop	July
New Dimensions in Public School Education in Agriculture, Danville, Illinois	July
The Teaching of Rural Studies by S. McB. Carson and R. W. Colton, New York	July
Plowman's Folly by Edward H. Faulkner	September
Farming in the West—Irrigated Crop Production by Walter E. Shore	September
The Agrarian Movement in Illinois, 1880-1896 by Roy V. Scott	September
Handbook of Agricultural Occupations by Norman K. Hoover	October
Approved Practices in Pasture Management by Malcom H. McVickar and John S. McVickar, second edition	October
A Dictionary of Agricultural and Allied Terminology	October
Farm Shop Plans and Student Notebook by Carlton E. Johnson, Revised 1963	November
Farm Business Management by E. D. Chastain, Jr., Jos. H. Yeager, and E. L. McGraw, 1962	November
Approved Practices in Sheep by Dr. E. M. Juergenson	November
Coppock, John Q.—North Atlantic Policy—The Agricultural Gap	November
Instructional Aids, How to Make Use of Them by Leslie W. Nelson	November
Planning Water Systems for Farm and Home by G. E. Henderson and others	November
Contract Farming, U.S.A. by Paul Roy Ewell, Ph.D.	December
Selecting, Fitting and Showing Horses by Julius E. Nordby and Herbert E. Lattig	December
Animal Science and Industry by Duane Acker	December

Antibiotics in Agriculture by Malcolm Woodbine, Editor	Year 1964	Farmers in Business by Joseph G. Knapp	May
An Introduction to Soil Science in the Southeast by	January	Cereal Crops by Warren H. Leonard and John H.	May
Charles D. Welch and Gerald D. McCart	January	Martin	May
Theory and Practice of Supervision by J. Minor Gwynn	January	The Dairy Cow by C. Craplet	May
Tractors and Their Power Units by E. L. Barger,	January	Profitable Farm Management by James E. Hamilton and	June
J. B. Liljedahl, W. M. Carleton and E. G. McKibben	February	W. R. Bryant	June
"Open Door to Learning" The Land Grant System Enters	February	Dairy Cattle Management—Principles and Applications by	June
its Second Century by Herman R. Allen	February	James W. Wing	June
Careers in Conservation by Henry Clepper	February	Opportunities in Agricultural Engineering by Archie A.	June
The Rain and Us by Terry Shannon	February	Stone	June
About Nuts by Solveig Paulson Russell	February	About Grasses, Grains and Canes by Melvin John Uhl	June
		1964	June

INDEX TO VOLUME 36

July, 1963 - June, 1964

The Agricultural Education Magazine

AUTHORS

Adams, J. R., Teacher (Retired), Kansas	188	Floyd, Arthur, Teacher, Alabama	13
Aebischer, Dale C., Supervision, Wisconsin	34	Franz, Reed, High School, Pennsylvania	42
Albrecht, Carl F., Dept. Agr. Eng., Michigan	195	Fuller, Gerald R., Teacher Education, Illinois	60
Allison, John W., Teacher, North Carolina	20		
Anderson, Jack, Teacher, Michigan	178	Gadda, H. W., Teacher Education, South Dakota	159
Anderson, Robert L., Teacher, Nebraska	81	Garver, Harold, Retired, Teacher, Kansas	18
Archer, Clyde F., Senior Agr. Ed., Ohio	158	Goudge, Fred L., Teacher, Iowa	260
Atherton, J. C., Teacher Education, Arkansas	75, 128, 147, 177	Green, H. W., Subject Matter Specialist, Alabama	163
Auell, Joseph N., Teacher, Nebraska	138	Guiler, Gilbert S., Teacher Education, Ohio	276
Bail, Joe P., Teacher Education, New York	243	Halterman, Jerry J., Teacher Education, California	106
Bailey, James A., Dist. Sup., Missouri	58	Hamilton, James E., Past President NVATA, Iowa	211
Bailey, Joseph K., Supervision, West Virginia	230	Hammonds, Carsie, Teacher Education, Kentucky	123
Barfield, Merrell, Teacher, Texas	258	Hanneman, Jim Assistant Graduate, New York	5, 14
Beach, Ross T., Teacher, Michigan	178	Harris, Wilmer L., Teacher, Pennsylvania	16
Beam, C. C., Teacher, Virginia	162	Harper, Joe, Teacher, Iowa	236-251
Beard, Harry G., Teacher, North Carolina	99	Hayward, Robert L., District Supervisor, Missouri	58
Beckett, F. E., Dept. Ag. Eng., Louisiana	31	Hemp, Paul E., Teacher Education, Illinois	124, 272
Bender, Ralph E., Teacher Education, Ohio	150	Henderson, Harry D., Agricultural Engineering, Wisconsin	200
Bentley, Ralph R., Teacher Education, Indiana	153	Herbst, J. H., Vocational Agriculture Service, Illinois	63
Benson, Donavon, Student Agr. Ed., Nebraska	62	Hoerner, Thomas A., Department Agricultural Engineering, Iowa	280
Benton, Ralph A., Teacher Education, Illinois	259	Holcomb, John, Teacher Education, Texas	175
Bishop, John E., Teacher, Iowa	19	Hollander, Arlyn W., Teacher, Wisconsin	208
Blackbourn, L. A., Teacher, Wisconsin	283	Hoover, Norman K., Teacher Education, Pennsylvania	226
Blackmon, J. H., Consultant, North Carolina	101	Horner, James T., Teacher Education, Nebraska	62, 231
Boucher, Leon W., Teacher Education, Ohio	53	Householder, Wm. A., Teacher Education, Michigan	133
Bressler, J., Teacher, Pennsylvania	43	Hoyt, Lindley, Teacher, Iowa	225
Bryant, Bert, Teacher, Oklahoma	186	Hudson, C. Jordan, Jr., Teacher, Virginia	15
Bullard, A. G., Supervision, North Carolina	79	Hutchinson, James H., Supervision, Louisiana	187
Burns, Paul E., Teacher, Michigan	89		
Burton, Wayne, Agriculture Economics Dept., Nevada	56	Ice, Alton D., Executive Secretary, Vo-Ag. Teachers Association of Texas	175
Byram, Harold, Teacher Education, Michigan	90, 219	Iverson, Maynard J., Teacher, North Dakota	39
Bjergo, Allen, Graduate Assistant Teacher Education, New Mexico	184		
		Jacobs, C. O., Farm Mechanics, Kansas	204
Campbell, Julian M., State Supervisor, Virginia	55	James, Gerald B., Supervision, North Carolina	99
Carnes, Wilson W., Editor National Future Farmer	176	Johnson, Carlton E., Agriculture Engineer, Ohio	198
Cardozer, V. R., Teacher Education, Maryland	130	Juergenson, E. C., Teacher Education, California	40
Chase, Harold, Teacher, Nebraska	132	Jungwirth, Dr E. G., Teacher Education, Israel	135
Christenson, Howard, Teacher Education, Nevada	56		
Christenson, V. E., Teacher Education New York	207	Krebs, Alfred H., Teacher Education, Illinois	11
Clark, Raymond M., Teacher Education, Michigan	108		
Clary, J. R., Supervision, North Carolina	270	Lamberth, Edwin E., Teacher Education, Tennessee	274
Clouse, James P., Teacher Education, Indiana	197	Larson, W. V., Teacher, Wisconsin	284
Clugston, Richard D., Teacher, Texas	252	La Rue, Lawrence, Teacher, Idaho	160
Cochran, G. R., Supervision, Minnesota	267	Lawrence, Layle D., Teacher, Kansas	140
Coster, John K., Teacher Education, Indiana	32, 212	Lawson, Lloyd, Supervision, Colo.	257
Cook, Roland, Teacher, Michigan	223	Legg, Otto, Teacher Education, Tennessee	161
Cooper, Melvin W., Assistant Supervisor, Wisconsin	114	Lewis, H. N., Livestock Specialist, Alabama	139
Cotton, Dale A., Executive Secretary, Oklahoma	255, 285	Lewis, James E., Teacher, Montana	277
Courtney, E. Wayne, Teacher Education, Indiana	32	Leyendecker, Phillip J., Dean, New Mexico	285
Cowden, Eugene, Teacher, Oregon	181	Lingle, Arnold, Teacher, North Carolina	92
Craig, Eugene, Teacher Education, Texas	112	Little, Clay, Agriculture Economics Dept., Nevada	56
Crawford, Harold R., Teacher, Iowa	250		
Cunningham, Clarence J., Teacher Education, Ohio	155	Mackey, Herbert W., Teacher, Oklahoma	248
Cunningham, Rex, Teacher, Ohio	44	Magisos, Joel H., Teacher Education, Washington	157
Cromer, C. A., Assistant Supervisor, Nebraska	152	Marshall, Avery E., Teacher, Wisconsin	82
Cullen, Mike, Teacher, Minnesota	246	Marvin, R. Paul, Teacher Education, Minnesota	57, 205
		McComas, J. D., Teacher Education, New Mexico	256, 285
Davies, Bruce, Farm Serv. Dir., Nebraska	173	McCormick, Floyd G., Teacher Education, Ohio	53
Dawson, C. G., Consultant, North Carolina	101	McFaren, C. S., Teacher Education, Virginia	67
Dean, C. E., Teacher Education, North Carolina	278		
Deems, Howard W., Teacher Education, Nebraska	77		
Denny, R. J., Supervision, North Carolina	270		
Duis, Harold F., Program Specialist U. S. Office Education	51		
Ebbert, J. Marvin, Teacher Education, Indiana	17, 197		
Eddington, Everett D., Teacher Education, Oklahoma	59		
Edwards, H. E., State Supervisor, West Virginia	171		

McPherson, H. J., Teacher, Illinois	230	Snyder, Fred, Dean, Pennsylvania	105
Miller, Texton R., Teacher Education, North Carolina	45	Sparrow, Richard L., Teacher, Indiana	228
Mitchell, Robert L., Teacher, Oklahoma	29	Starosta, Allen E., Teacher, Kansas	3
Monson, Marvin R., Teacher, Nebraska	279	Sutherland, S. S., Agricultural Education, California	103
Morton J. B., Supervision, Oklahoma	261		
Nelson, Norbert J., Teacher Education, Indiana	212	Taylor, Robert E., Dir. Natl. Center Agricultural Education	110
Nestingen, Dale, Teacher, Wisconsin	69	Teleison, Kemble H., Teacher, Oregon	141
Norton, Wesley, Teacher, California	113	Thompson, Evans G., Teacher Education, Virginia	30
O'Connell, Edward J., Teacher, Minnesota	66	Thompson, John F., Graduate Assistant, Maryland	224
Omar, Ahmed M., Graduate Student, Michigan	180	Thompson, Louis M., Assistant Dean, Iowa	221
Owen, Carlus R., Teacher, Tennessee	12	Thompson, O. E., Teacher Education, California	234
Parker, Irvn, Teacher, Nebraska	14	Tiner, E. L., Supervision, Texas	136
Pautz, Norman, Teacher, Wisconsin	47	Towne, Douglas C., Teacher, Pennsylvania	7
Perry, Edward, Teacher, Oklahoma	245	Tugend, David M., Agricultural Ext. Agent, Maryland	210
Peterson, Milo J., Teacher Education, Minnesota	182		
Quarles, N. K., Teacher Education, Texas	16, 78	Utech, Allen L., Assistant Supervisor, Illinois	93
Richard, C. E., Teacher Education, Virginia	129		
Ridenour, Harlan E., Teacher Education, Ohio	237	Walker, Robert W., Teacher	235
Rodgers, John H., Teacher Education, South Carolina	233	Ward, Walter, Teacher, Alaska	184
Sandy, D. R., Teacher, Nebraska	231	Warmbrod, J. R., Teacher Education, Illinois	9
Saloutos, Charles, Teacher Education, Wisconsin	200	Weale, Durland, Teacher, New York	21
Sasman, Louis, former State Supervisor, Wisconsin	20, 116	Weaver, W. S., Teacher, Indiana	185
Scarborough, Cayce, Teacher Education, North Carolina	54	Welton, Richard F., Teacher, Nebraska	6
Severance, Robert Jr., Teacher, Kansas	68	West, Carlton, Teacher, New York	65
Sheppard, Dr. Chas., Ext. Spec. Poultry, Michigan	133	Weston, Curtis R., Teacher Education, Missouri	281
Shoaf, Harold, Supervision, Kansas	269	Wieggers, George W. Jr., Teacher Education, Tennessee	27
Shotwell, Thomas K., Graduate Student, Louisiana	68	Wilson, Richard H., Teacher Education, Ohio	127
		Woerdchoff, Frank J., Teacher Education, Indiana	212
		Woodin, Ralph J., Teacher Education, Ohio	3, 27, 75, 95, 99, 147, 123, 171, 172, 214, 243, 247 253 267
		Yates, J. L., Teacher, Alabama	203



E. M. Juergenson

California Employers Cooperate in Work Experience

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Jarrold T. Davis

The concept of work experience in vocational education is akin to mother love in society—always taken for granted, of unquestioned virtue, and an integral part of the program.

Since the early days of vocational agriculture, on-the-job training has been obtained through the projects involving ownership. Although work experience has always been recognized as one avenue of learning by doing, the full potential of work experience in many areas of vocational education has barely been scratched.

There are many values to a work-experience program, including a better appreciation of the vocation concerned, a chance to earn money, an opportunity to better decide on a career, and especially a chance to augment classroom instruction through a learning-by-doing experience.

In vocational agriculture the need for supplementing classroom instruction has traditionally been met by some form of supervised practice on a student home farm. In most cases this practice has been realized by a student raising either livestock or

crops, often for competition in a fair or show.

This form of supervised practice has been quite valuable, and for a sizeable percentage of students in vocational agriculture will so continue. However, as the ways people earn a living and spend their leisure time have changed so have the individual student's background and the vocational opportunities changed in a typical class in vocational agriculture. Therefore, many students who are interested in the broad field of agriculture find it impractical and difficult to gain experience through an ownership project. Even if a student does, by some ingenious means, obtain an ownership project, it may not provide the breadth of experience that is provided by working under supervision in the actual job for which he is training.

The vocational agriculture department of the Nevada Union High School, Grass Valley, California, had been using work experience to a limited degree and was interested in discovering the full potential in this

program. For a number of years some 15 to 20 students per year in this school have been placed on farms and in related industries, especially during the summer months, in a work experience program. While the program proved successful, the initiation and to some degree the supervision was happenstance as time permitted.

This department was interested in finding answers to two questions: (1) had the number of students participating in the current school program already saturated the local work experience opportunities, and (2) what would employer reaction be to outside supervision? The school administration was also interested as results of the study could have an implication for a total school effort toward combating drop-outs and making more students employable, including both girls and boys in all vocations.

In order to find answers to these questions, a joint study was organized by the agriculture department of Nevada Union High School and the Agricultural Education Department of